

this law and to make wellness a possibility for many who, for far too long, had been left out of the health care system. October 1 signals a brand new day for them and for our country, and we should celebrate it and do everything we can to make sure everyone in our districts enjoys these benefits.

HHS: A TRICKLE OF DATA, A TORRENT OF SPIN

(Mr. BURGESS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, once again, the President is trying to mislead and hide the truth from the Congress and the American people. The Department of Health and Human Services released a report yesterday on the pricing of health plans on the Federal exchanges—a perfect example of bureaucratic doublespeak.

The report was quick to say that rates were 16 percent under their projections. Well, that sounds great, but what were their projections? Does that mean the rates will increase or decrease? They went to a lot of trouble to avoid answering that question. Some digging by Forbes Magazine, however, uncovered the truth. For 40-year-olds, rates will increase by an average of 99 percent for men, and 62 percent for women. It seems that the truth is a lot different.

The biggest problem, however, isn't the rate increase. With only 5 days left until implementation, the administration is unwilling or incapable of answering even basic questions. The data they released was only partial data samples.

It's time for the Department of Health and Human Services to stop playing games and hiding the truth, and time to give the American people the full truth about what the President's takeover of health care really means.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 5 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 11 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1700

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HOLDING) at 5 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas

and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later.

FIRE-RETARDANT MATERIALS EXEMPTION EXTENSION

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1961) to amend title 46, United States Code, to extend the exemption from the fire-retardant materials construction requirement for vessels operating within the Boundary Line.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1961

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. EXTENSION OF EXEMPTION.

Section 3503(a) of title 46, United States Code, is amended by striking "2008" and inserting "2028".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1961.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

H.R. 1961 renews the exemption for the Delta Queen from certain Coast Guard requirements adopted decades after the vessel was built.

The Delta Queen, a paddle-wheel riverboat, was built in 1926. It operated in California until 1947 and then carried tourists up and down the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers for more than 60 years. Forty years after the vessel was built, Congress set new rules prohibiting wooden ships from carrying 50 or more overnight passengers. The vessel has a steel hull, but a wooden superstructure.

Between 1968 and 2008, the Delta Queen operated under an exemption from the restriction on wooden passenger vessels, which was renewed nine times by Congress. H.R. 1961 reinstates the Delta Queen exemption. The vessel will still be subject to all other Coast Guard passenger vessel safety requirements. It must undergo required inspections and receive a certificate of inspection, like any other passenger vessel.

I commend my colleague from Ohio, STEVE CHABOT, and the bill's bipartisan cosponsors for introducing this bill. Permitting the Delta Queen to return to the river is estimated to create 170 jobs and produce economic activity of \$9.3 million annually.

The bill before us was reported favorably from the Transportation Committee on a voice vote. I urge my colleagues to support this bill and allow this historic vessel to return to the river.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I was the chairman of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee in 2008 when Congress last rejected the measure before us today, and there has been no change in the intervening years that would now make this measure good policy. H.R. 1961 is a bill that would amend Federal law for the benefit of one single vessel, the Delta Queen. As such, I think we should call this bill what it really is: it's an earmark. Let me say that again: it's an earmark.

And what would this earmark do? First, it would create a potential fire trap on the water. In 1936, the United States required all passenger vessels to be constructed of fire-retardant materials. The Delta Queen was built in 1926, and part of its construction occurred in Europe. Its superstructure is wooden and not flame retardant. Exempting the Delta Queen from current fire safety standards would present an unacceptable and, frankly, unnecessary risk to passenger safety.

When this issue was last considered, the Coast Guard stated the following:

The combustible construction of the vessel presents an unacceptable fire risk that cannot be mitigated by the addition of fire suppression measures.

Just yesterday, I talked to Rear Admiral Joseph Servidio, the Coast Guard's assistant commandant for prevention policy. He oversees vessel inspections, and he made it clear to me that the Coast Guard continues to oppose this waiver. He also made it clear that a number of safety concerns may persist from the Coast Guard's 2008 special inspection of the Delta Queen.

And, frankly, the exemption this legislation seeks to make is not needed for the Delta Queen to operate on the Mississippi again if it wanted to do so. Let me say that again: the Delta Queen does not need the exemption that would be provided by this bill to operate in U.S. waters. The Delta Queen could take passengers on day cruises, and it could host up to 49 overnight passengers right now. But under current law, it cannot host 50 or more overnight passengers. The only thing the exemption sought in H.R. 1961 would do is increase the number of overnight passengers the Delta Queen could carry along our Nation's waterways, thus increasing the number of passengers who would be at risk should a fire break out on the boat.

What else would this earmark do? This earmark would interfere in a competitive market to pick winners and losers by giving an advantage to one vessel, something I thought my friends on the other side of the aisle said Congress should not be in the business of doing.